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ABSTRACT

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF THIS DOCUMENT: This exercise replaces the standard, often boring introductory lecture on using the dictionary with a group assignment that encourages the students to observe and analyze the entry for at least one word very carefully. In doing so, the students discover for themselves both the kinds of information given in a dictionary entry and the particular way in which the information is ordered. After the students spend an entire class period analyzing a single dictionary entry, they seem more inclined to view their dictionaries as useful resources, and I encourage this by "allowing" them to look up words during tests and in-class writings. I have used this exercise in college writing classes, but it could also be used in high school English courses. The students form groups with four or five members and choose a secretary to record their discoveries. Each student is then given a photocopy of the same entire page of a large hardbound dictionary, such as "The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language." I tell the students to focus only on the word "pique." ("Pique" appears in one of their readings, and in class prior to this exercise we discuss the meaning of the word in its context. Obviously, any slightly exotic word could work equally as well.) The students study this entry carefully and list all the information that the one entry gives them about the word, and also anything they notice about the order of the information. To spur them on, I tell them I discovered sixteen bits of information in ten minutes. The students easily surpass my discoveries in one class period: generally, their lists cover two or three pages. On their own, they study other words from the same root (piquant, pique, piquet) for clues, realizing in some instances what has not been told about the word "pique." In the last ten minutes of class, I "reluctantly" let them study the general information on dictionaries in their handbooks, but only rarely do they find something to add to their group's responses. The students enjoy this assignment, but more importantly, they learn more when they are actually using the dictionary to discover something for themselves than when I tell them about it. Finally, this exercise engages even the students who have heard the standard lecture about the dictionary, and protest that they "already know how to use it." (Author)

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# "Pique": A Group Dictionary Assignment

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## Level:

High school and college

## Author's Comment:

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## The Approach:

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